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Falling stars and sinking ships: Framing and metaphor in cartoons about Brexit

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Abstract

The present study provides a systematic analysis of 119 satirical cartoons on Brexit, published by European and non-European artists between 23 May and 30 June 2016. Particular attention is paid to the cartoonists' use of 'metaphor scenarios' (Musolff, 2017) and their role in framing the causes and consequences of Brexit. Our analysis yielded the following key findings: (1) Most cartoons take a generic stance against or in favour of Brexit, without directly engaging with specific arguments. (2) Several Remain and Leave cartoons engage with the same scenarios, turning them against each other through the rhetorical strategy known as *trumping*. (3) Personification is far more frequently used to depict the UK than the EU; this may be due to the greater difficulty of representing the EU through one single character. (4) In most Remain cartoons, metaphor scenarios point towards extreme and irreversible outcomes for the UK, thus mirroring the hyperbolic rhetoric used by Leave supporters.

Keywords

Brexit, cartoons, crisis, European Union, framing, metaphor, scenario

1. Introduction

1.1 Research context: Brexit and metaphor

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'Brexit' – a blend of *Britain* and *exit* – first appeared in 2012. It famously refers to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom

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(UK) from the European Union (EU) – a process which officially started after the referendum of 23 June 2016, when 52 per cent of British voters expressed their wish to leave the EU, as opposed to 48 per cent voting to remain. The image of Britain ‘exiting’ the EU is, in itself, metaphorical: it entails a personification of Britain physically leaving the building (or, more abstractly, the container) to which the EU is implicitly compared. This original trope gave way to a remarkable flourishing of metaphorical discourse, translating the complex dynamics of Brexit into the most diverse images. As promptly noted by a large number of journalists and bloggers, the abundance of food, sport, or romantic analogies has been a striking feature of political and media discourse both before and after the referendum (Cashmore, 2018; Connolly, 2017; Landale, 2017; Poole, 2017; Thrower, 2017).

The key role played by metaphor in Brexit debates does not really come as a surprise, considering the particular rhetorical affordances yielded by this trope – as stated in a classic study on the subject, ‘metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities [and] may thus be a guide for future action’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 156). In other words, metaphor is a very powerful tool for *framing* reality, i.e. for ‘select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (Entman, 1993: 52). The framing power of metaphor has been widely investigated by scholars in recent years (Semino et al., 2018; Boeynaems et al., 2017; Brugman et al., 2017; Ritchie, 2013; Musolff, 2006), with specific attention paid to the framing of economic, political and social crises in contemporary Europe (Valdivia, 2017). A crucial notion in this respect is that of *scenario*, denoting a ‘figurative mini-narrative’ generated by a given metaphor and expressing an ‘evaluative stance’ on the perceived reality (Musolff, 2017: 3). The ability of metaphor to generate narrative scenarios is particularly evident in satirical cartoons, which often abound in monomodal (visual) or multimodal (verbal and visual) metaphors (see Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, 2009). For this reason, focusing on cartoons can grant us special insight into the role of metaphor in the debates preceding and following the Brexit vote; more generally, it can help us further explore the discursive implications of the ‘fractures’ produced by Europe’s recent political, economic and social crises, of which Brexit was ‘perhaps the most dramatic expression’ (Castells et al., 2018: 8).

Brexit-related metaphorical discourse has already been made the subject of scholarly investigation. Andreas Musolff (2017) offers a compelling analysis of one particular scenario – best summarized by the formulation *Britain at the heart of Europe* – and its metamorphoses during the Brexit campaign, with exclusive regard to verbal metaphors in the British press. The scope of Musolff’s study is deliberately narrow and could be expanded in several directions, including: (1) from one scenario to a comparative analysis of multiple scenarios; (2) from verbal to visual and multimodal metaphors; (3) from the British press to a broader international corpus. Similarly, Tatiana Đurović and Nadežda Silaški (2018) limit their insightful analysis to one specific scenario (the UK and the EU as MARRIED PARTNERS) as documented by verbal-only metaphors collected from English-language sources. On the other hand, two recent articles focus more extensively on cartoons, and set out to provide a comprehensive overview of different scenarios. The first,

by Olena Morozova (2017), successfully identifies a broad range of Brexit scenarios in verbal and multimodal metaphors (such as SPORT, WAR, DIVORCE and GAME OF CARDS), and detects a widespread interplay between metaphor and metonymy (which will be discussed further in this paper). The second, by Cinzia Spinzi and Elena Manca (2017), explores the use of metaphor and metonymy in cartoons published by British magazines and newspapers in the light of three overarching categories: ‘confusion’, ‘conflict’ and ‘EU’s role and identity’. Neither article, however, provides a systematic statistical analysis of its respective corpus (e.g. there are no indications regarding the frequency and distribution of each scenario). Besides, metaphor is not discussed in relation to the sources’ position on Brexit, thus blurring the possible differences between pro-Leave and pro-Remain cartoons.

Building on this previous research, this article will provide a quali-quantitative analysis of ‘metaphor scenarios’ from an international corpus of satirical cartoons about Brexit, paying particular attention to the links between metaphor, framing and ultimate position concerning Brexit (Leave, Remain, or undefined – listed as ‘n.a.’). Our key research questions can be summarized as follows: (1) How do cartoonists frame Brexit? What causes and possible consequences do they foreground for Brexit, and how do they engage with the arguments used by Remain and Leave campaigners? (2) Are there any differences between European and non-European cartoonists in this respect? (3) What are the most frequent metaphor scenarios, and how do they relate to the cartoonists’ framing of Brexit? (4) Are there any notable differences between the visual or multimodal metaphors employed by cartoonists, and the verbal metaphors used by UK and EU politicians during the Brexit campaign? (5) Lastly, what can the case of Brexit teach us about the role of metaphorical discourse in times of political crisis?

1.2 Corpus and general methodology

Our corpus is composed of 119 cartoons by 48 cartoonists from Daryl Cagle’s syndicate, whose work is available via politicalcartoons.com. This website is generally considered the largest searchable online database for political cartoons, and has already been used as a source in previous studies (e.g. Van Hecke, 2017). In order to assemble the corpus we typed in ‘Brexit’ as our keyword, and restricted our search to the period between 23 May (one month before the referendum) to 30 June 2016; the search yielded a total of 136 cartoons. Due to the aims of this study, only cartoons featuring visual or multimodal metaphors were selected, which narrowed the list down to 122 items. Notably, 89 per cent of the total passed this first stage of the selection – a result which is fully in line with the claim that visual and multimodal metaphors are key resources in political cartoons (see for instance El Refaie, 2009; Schilperoord and Maes, 2009). At a later stage, we excluded three cartoons by two cartoonists because they were virtually identical to other works by the same cartoonist, which were already part of the corpus. As shown in Table 1, nine out of 48 cartoonists produced at least three cartoons on the topic (with a peak of 22 by Marian Kamensky); 17 cartoonists contributed two items, while 21 are only present with one cartoon. In terms of geographical distribution, 19 cartoonists are European, while 29 are from outside Europe. 39 cartoons are solely visual; 80 are multimodal, combining visual and verbal modes. 37 cartoons date back to before the referendum, whereas 82 were created between 23 and 30 June 2016.

Table 1. List of cartoonists.

Number of cartoons	Cartoonist(s)
22	Kamensky (European) (E)
10	Van Dam (E)
6	Tom (E); Bertrams (E)
5	Komarnitski (E)
4	Luo Jie (non-E); Cristina (E)
3	Chapatte (E); Kontouris (E); Paresch (non-E)
2	Boligan (non-E); Cagle (non-E); Collignon (E); Day (non-E); Delonas (non-E); Sluka (E); Granlund (non-E); Hajjaj (non-E); Hajo (E); Hansson (E); Kap (E); Margulies (NE); Matson (NE); Pismetrovic (E); Priggee (non-E); Sack (non-E); Sutovec (E)
1	Beeler (non-E); Bish (non-E); Cole (non-E); Constantin (E); Crowe (non-E); Darcow (non-E); Dry Bones (non-E); Heller (non-E); Koterba (non-E); Mackee (non-E); Manila (non-E); Pavel (E); Rousso (E); Schot (E); Siers (non-E); Simanca (non-E); Taylor Jones (non-E); Wolverton (non-E); Zygdis (non-E)

Our analysis focused both on framing (the causes, consequences and arguments addressed by the cartoonists) and on metaphor scenarios. As already tested in previous research by the authors (e.g. Pedrazzini and Scheuer, 2018), our analysis involved a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998): our categories were adjusted – and new ones were developed – during the coding of the data in an iterative process that continued until the data did not require any further adjustment in the categories. We then proceeded to analyse the cartoons by repeatedly examining them in the light of our categories. Both authors of this paper coded all of the cartoons independently, and then compared their respective results; when the coding did not match, the discrepancy was resolved through negotiation. More details about the coding in relation to framing and metaphor scenarios will be provided in Sections 2 and 3 respectively.

2. Framing Brexit

2.1 Methodology

For this part of the analysis, the following dimensions and categories were considered: (1) *Cartoonist’s origin*: European, non-European. (2) *Position on Brexit*: Remain, Leave, or undefined (n.a.). (3) *Temporality*: was the cartoon made before or after the referendum? (4) *Possible causes of Brexit*: problems in the UK, problems in the EU, problems in both, no problems mentioned. (5) *Possible consequences of Brexit*: bad consequences for the UK, bad consequences for the EU, bad consequences for both, good consequences for the UK, other consequences, or no consequences. (6) *Arguments*: our mapping of the arguments used in the Leave and Remain campaigns was based on a list of 12 key topics issued by the BBC in its special ‘EU Referendum’ section (BBC, 2016). This source provided a particularly clear and comprehensive overview of the most frequent arguments surrounding Brexit, revolving around the following crucial issues: consumer

affairs; the cost of EU membership; education and research; energy and environment; farming and fishing; global role and defence; immigration; policing and security; sovereignty and laws; trade and economy; travel and living abroad; work and pay.

A further step was to apply chi-square tests of independence to study the relation between the six dimensions and their corresponding categories, in the following selected combinations: cartoonist's origin x position on Brexit; cartoonist's origin x temporality; cartoonist's origin x possible causes of Brexit; cartoonist's origin x possible consequences of Brexit. To study the nature of the observed dependences, adjusted residuals (Haberman, 1973) were subsequently applied, which allow over- and under-represented categories to be identified (statistical significance ≥ 2).

2.2 Results

A first result worth highlighting refers to the cartoonists' positions on Brexit, as identifiable from the analysis of their work. The majority of the cartoons (62 per cent) can be considered 'pro-Remain', while only 10 per cent are openly 'pro-Leave'. In 28 per cent of cases, no discernible position was identified. Most of the cartoons were published in the aftermath of the referendum: among the pro-Remain cartoons, only 30 per cent were created before June 23, and the quota is even lower (17 per cent) for the pro-Leave cartoons. Furthermore, the non-parametric analyses carried out allowed us to identify some significant differences between European and non-European cartoons. In the case of European cartoonists, we identified an over-representation of problems in the EU as a cause of Brexit (Adjusted Residuals = 2.74) and bad consequences for the EU as a consequence of it (Adjusted Residuals = 2.35). Europeans' cartoons were more numerous than expected before the referendum (Adjusted Residuals = 2.93), while non-European cartoons were more numerous than expected after the referendum (Adjusted Residuals = 2.93). This last finding seems to be related to the higher frequency of pro-Leave positions among non-Europeans: several cartoons created outside Europe after 23 June argue that the United Kingdom was strengthened by the referendum (Adjusted Residuals = 3.97), and showed its power to the EU.

A more fine-grained analysis allowed us to identify more specific categories regarding apparent causes and consequences addressed by cartoonists. As shown in Table 2, almost half the corpus addresses problems in the UK as a (possible) cause for Brexit: the incompetence or irresponsibility of UK politicians is the most frequent purported cause (with most focusing on the failings of David Cameron, Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage), followed very closely by the voters' lack of awareness and information. Cartoonists also refer to national pride and imperial nostalgia, to a rise in intolerance and far-right positions, and to the perception that the United Kingdom feels closer to the USA than to the EU, while remaining fundamentally incompatible with the latter. In the case of cartoons dealing with problems in the EU as a possible cause for Brexit (14 per cent of the total), the problem most frequently addressed is the excess of EU regulations, causing the UK to feel suffocated (see Figure 1). The second most frequent problem is the idea of the EU's lack of unity, leading to its political crisis. The perceived permissiveness of European migration policies, sometimes linked to terrorism, appears as a third problem. Eleven per cent of cartoons refer to problems both in the UK and the EU, whereas no specific problems are mentioned in 28 per cent of cartoons.

Table 2. Causes of Brexit (categories in the third column are not mutually exclusive).

CAUSES: PROBLEMS	TOTAL	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY
In the UK	56 (47%)	Incompetence of politicians	24
		Lack of information; unawareness	22
		National pride/imperialism	17
		Intolerance	12
		UK closer to USA/incompatibility with the EU	8
		Other/no specification	1
		TOTAL	84
In the EU	17 (14%)	Excess of EU regulations	16
		Lack of unity/EU is in crisis	10
		Migration policies/terrorism	6
		Other/no specification	2
		TOTAL	34
In both	13 (11%)		
Not mentioned	33 (28%)		

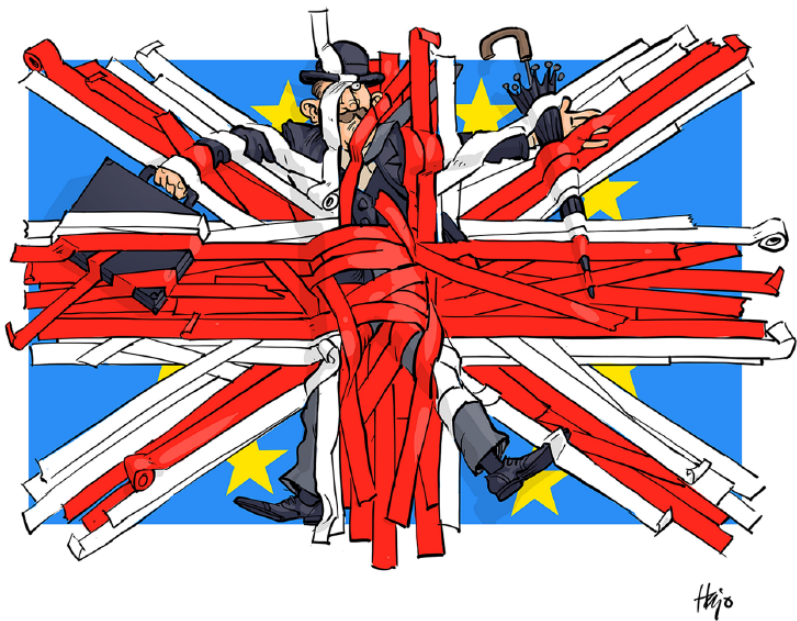


Figure 1. © Hajo de Reijger, politicalcartoons.com, 23 June 2016.

Table 3 focuses on the possible consequences of Brexit. Most of the cartoons (58 per cent) refer to bad consequences for the UK. By far the most frequent prognosis

Table 3. Consequences of Brexit (categories in the third column are not mutually exclusive).

CONSEQUENCES	TOTAL	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY
Bad for the UK	69 (58%)	Brexit as a self-destructive decision	52
		Division of the country	14
		Isolation	14
		Against the course of history	11
		Bad for Cameron	8
		Violence, right-wing extremism	6
		Other / no specification	6
		TOTAL	111
Bad for the EU	14 (11%)	UK is an important part of EU	6
		Other/no specification	23
		TOTAL	29
Bad for both	11 (9%)		
Good for the UK	9 (7%)	UK is strengthened	9
Other	7 (6%)	No consequences for the EU	2
		Bad for the USA	3
		Good for the EU	2
Not mentioned	11 (%)		

(52 out of 119 cartoons) is that Brexit is a self-destructive decision – this idea will be further explored in Section 3.5. Internal divisions (Leave v. Remain, or England v. Scotland) and the UK's isolation are also frequently represented as inevitable consequences of Brexit. A fourth negative consequence is the belief that Brexit runs against the course of history and will lead to social and political regression, followed by cartoons that refer to bad consequences for the Prime Minister (in particular, Cameron being forced to resign after the referendum). One last negative consequence for the UK (related to one of the causes mentioned above) is an upsurge in violence and right-wing extremism. On the other hand, cartoons addressing bad consequences for the EU only represent 24 per cent of the total; in most of them such consequences are not further specified, while in six cases the claim is that the UK is too important a member of the EU – therefore its withdrawal will be a heavy blow for the European project. Nine per cent of the cartoons present negative consequences for both the UK and the EU; 7 per cent suggest positive consequences for the UK, which is presented as stronger after leaving the EU. Less frequent consequences include: no change after Brexit, negative consequences for the USA, and Brexit as ultimately good for the EU. In 11 per cent of the cartoons, no consequences have been identified.

Remain cartoons are the chief source for the diversity of causes and consequences mentioned above. The profile of Leave cartoons – representing a minority in the corpus – is more homogeneous; most of them were created after the referendum by US cartoonists, and the predominant argument is that Brexit set the UK free from the constraints imposed by EU regulations (especially with regard to the economy). National pride and imperial nostalgia are presented as an additional cause in these cartoons, by means of

national symbols such as Winston Churchill, Royal Navy galleons, or lions (see Section 3.4). As stated above, some of these cartoons also argue that Britain is closer to the US than to the EU (eight occurrences).

Some of the arguments that dominated the Brexit debate can be recognized among the causes and consequences identified in the corpus of cartoons. Indeed, certain connections can be established between the six categories from Tables 2 and 3 on the one hand, and the BBC list of key topics on the other:

A. ‘National pride and imperial nostalgia’ and ‘UK feels limited by the EU’ → ‘Sovereignty and laws’

Two of the causes presented in Table 2 refer to issues of sovereignty and law. Pro-Brexit campaigners argued that voting Leave was the only way to regain full sovereignty, i.e. freedom from EU directives (BBC, 2016). The most frequent slogans used by Leavers – such as ‘Vote Leave, take back control’ or ‘Make Britain Great Again’ – were in line with this claim (Buckledee, 2018). In a cartoon by Beeler published on 27 June 2016, for example, a lion (used here as a typical British icon) is standing in a Trump-like pose, holding a ‘Make Britain Great Again’ sign (Beeler, 2016).

B. ‘UK feels (economically) limited by the EU’ → ‘Consumer affairs and cost of membership’

Leave campaigners have claimed that the EU is burdened by excessive bureaucracy, which not only delays business but also makes goods and services more expensive. Indeed, the ‘EU red tape’ slogan was present in public debates; in Figure 1, a stereotypically British businessman is tied to the EU logo by layers of red tape, ironically recreating the shape of the Union Jack.

C. ‘Intolerance’, ‘Migration policies/Terrorism’ and ‘Violence, right-wing extremism, Nazism, terrorism’ → ‘Policing and security’ and ‘Immigration’

Immigration is a common point for some arguments appearing in cartoons from both the Leave and the Remain sides. On the one hand, pro-Brexit cartoons suggest that EU migration policies are too lax; on the other, in some Remain cartoons, UKIP politicians – Nigel Farage in particular – are accused of being intolerant and xenophobic. Growing intolerance and right-wing extremism are frequently presented as both a possible cause and a likely consequence of Brexit (see, for instance, Figure 2).

D. ‘Isolation’ → ‘Global role and defence’

Remain campaigners claimed that leaving the EU ‘would diminish Britain’s influence on the world stage’ (BBC, 2016). Fourteen cartoons (11 per cent of the corpus) present isolation as a possible consequence of Brexit – as in a cartoon by Siers (24 June 2016), showing a solitary Union Flag planted on the moon; in this particular example, the irony is further enhanced by the quotation from Shakespeare’s *Richard II* (‘This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England’).

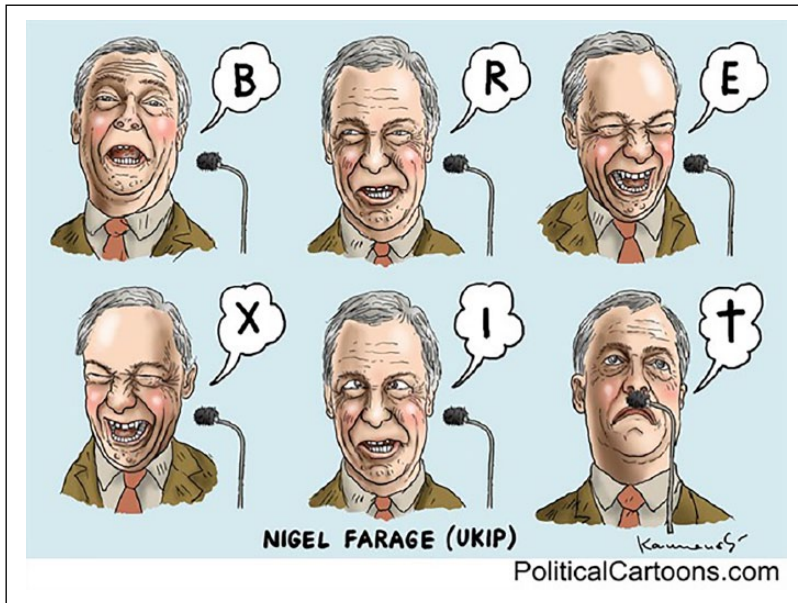


Figure 2. © Marian Kamensky, politicalcartoons.com, 19 June 2016.

Figure 3 shows that seven of the key topics proposed by the BBC are addressed in almost half of the corpus. ‘Sovereignty and laws’ leads with 17 per cent of cases, followed by ‘Global role and defence’, which appeared in 9 per cent of the cartoons, and ‘Immigration’ with 7 per cent. ‘Trade and economy’ was identified in 5 per cent of the corpus, but does not present a particular trend in relation to any specific cause or consequence. No specific references to the following five key topics proposed by the BBC were detected in the corpus: education and research; energy and environment; farming and fishing; travel and living abroad; and work and pay. It is interesting to note that 46 per cent of the cartoons address Brexit and its possible causes and consequences from a general perspective, without referring to any specific aspect or argument. Nine per cent of cartoons were coded as ‘non-applicable’ since they address other aspects of Brexit, such as the assertion that the debate is dividing the country or that Brexit might pave the way for more referenda in other EU countries.

The finding that nearly half of the cartoons adopt a generic perspective on Brexit provides us with some interesting insight into how the cartoon genre functions. Cartoons propose a highly synthesized view of complex phenomena, and their framing strategies are usually linked to the author’s desire to denounce a particular situation and/or to alert the readership; in order to do so, cartoonists often present a visually condensed idea that is capable of captivating or shocking the reader. As a consequence, cartoons can be extremely complex texts due to their high density (Pedrazzini and Scheuer, 2018) and degree of implicitness, which is often enhanced through the use of irony, allusion or parody. More precisely, rhetorical complexity can actually serve as a tool for argumentative synthesis, by way of translating a multi-faceted political reality into a concise,

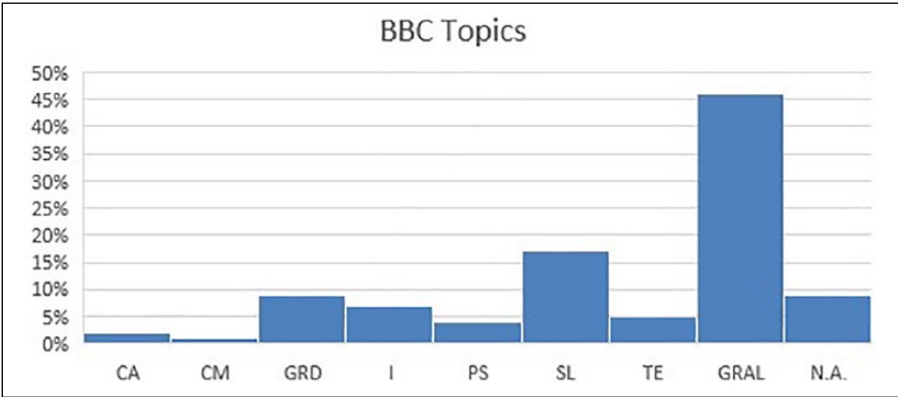


Figure 3. Distribution of the key topics proposed from the BBC list (BBC, 2016): consumer affairs (CA); cost of membership (CM); global role and defence (GRD); immigration (I); policing and security (PS); sovereignty and laws (SL); trade and economy (TE); general (GRAL); and non-applicable (N.A.).

memorable mini-narrative. In other words, cartoons can employ complex strategies in order to facilitate our understanding of a political reality by making it more easily accessible via *fast thinking*, rather than *slow thinking* (Kahneman, 2011). A crucial role in this respect is played by metaphor scenarios. Building on the results discussed above, the following section will explore the framing power of metaphor in cartoons about Brexit, as well as suggesting more general hypotheses on the relation between political crisis and figurative language.

3. Metaphor scenarios

3.1 Methodology

For this second stage in our analysis, the following characteristics were taken into account: (1) *Source UK*: the image used by the cartoonist to represent the UK via metaphor or metonymy. In the former, the source and the target come from two different conceptual domains, while in the latter they come from the same domain (see Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011). (2) *Source EU*: the image used by the cartoonist to represent the EU. (3) *Action*: the action foregrounded in the cartoon, which can be performed by the UK, the EU or both. (4) *Effect*: the main effect or potential effect produced by this action. (5) *Scenario*: the mini-narrative generated by the cartoon as a whole. Based on our grounded theory approach (see Section 1.2), the categories set out in Table 4 were created.

The cartoons were subsequently coded in the light of the categories defined above. The distribution of each category was mapped in relation to the origin of the cartoons (European v. non-European) and their position on Brexit (Leave, Remain, n.a.). In the following sections, we will present and discuss the results concerning Scenarios (3.2), Source UK (3.3), Source EU (3.4) and Effect (3.5).

Table 4. Categories used for the analysis of metaphor scenarios.

Scenario (abbreviation given in parentheses)	Brexit as . . . fight/unrest among animals ('animals'); leaving/damaging a building ('building'); opening/closing a door ('door'); game, sport, or competition ('game'); someone being shot ('gun'); Independence Day ('independence'); marital crisis or divorce ('marriage'); defective/malfunctioning parachute ('parachute'); falling from a precipice ('precipice'); a roadtrip ('roadtrip'); travelling by sea ('ship'); being lost in outer space ('space'); EU losing a star ('star'); being stranded on an island ('stranded'); cutting a branch from a tree ('tree'); untying/setting someone free ('untying'); vomiting ('vomit'); Nazism/World War II ('WWII'); other
Source UK	person; animal; vehicle; star; land (or geographical shape); building; other object; n.a.
Source EU	person; animal; vehicle; stars; land (or geographical shape); building; other object; n.a.
Action	breaking; falling; hurting (others or oneself); leaving; playing; removing; sinking; splitting; transforming; travelling; tying/untying; other; n.a.
Effect	death; injury; isolation; regression; destruction; dysfunction; empowerment; safety

3.2 Scenarios

As shown in Figure 4, the most frequent scenario is the EU losing a star (13 per cent of the corpus), followed by: travel by sea (10 per cent); unrest among animals (8 per cent); games, sport or competition (8 per cent); leaving or damaging a building (8 per cent); Nazism/World War II (7 per cent); falling from a precipice (6 per cent); roadtrip (6 per cent); defective or malfunctioning parachute (5 per cent); being lost in outer space (2 per cent) and being shot with a gun (2 per cent). Figure 5 provides a filtered version of the results, conceived in order to avoid any possible bias deriving from a single cartoonist's preference for a given scenario; however, there are no substantial changes to the list outlined above.

The origin of the cartoons (European v. non-European) does not seem to be a significant factor in the distribution of scenarios; the only notable difference is that US cartoonists tend to read Brexit through the lens of their own national history and current political situation, as shown by the metaphorical references to Independence Day (Heller, 25 June 2016; Crowe, 29 June 2016) and Donald Trump (Beeler, 27 June 2016). On the other hand, a stronger divergence can be noticed between Leave and Remain cartoons, with particular regard to the NAZISM/WORLD WAR II scenario. In Leave cartoons, references to World War II establish a parallel between Brexiteers and Churchill, liberating the country from the Nazi oppressor; Churchill embodies the UK in both Leave cartoons pertaining to this scenario (Bish, 24 June; Delonas, 29 June). This use of 'historical intertextuality' (Spinzi and Manca, 2017: 252) is fully in line with the verbal rhetoric employed by pro-Brexit politicians: in May 2016, Boris Johnson famously claimed that 'the EU wants a superstate, just as Hitler did' (*Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 2016; see Musolff, 2017: 3). Interestingly, roles are reversed in Remain cartoons: in five occurrences out of six, Nazi references are used by Remain cartoonists to illustrate the resurgence of xenophobia and far-right ideology in the UK (see Figure 2, featuring a sequence of close-ups of Nigel

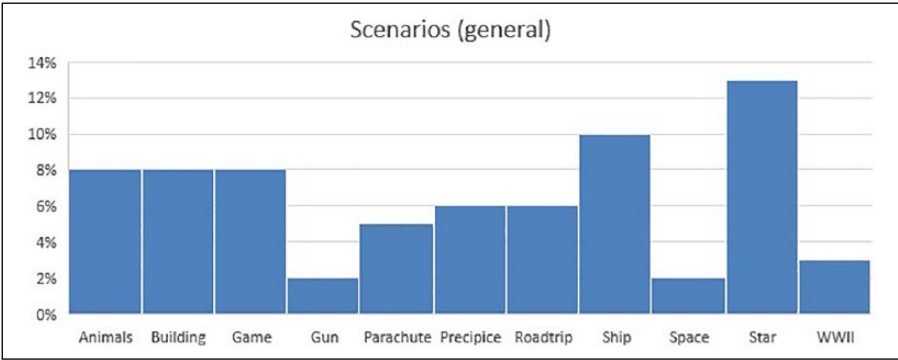


Figure 4. Statistical distribution of scenarios in the corpus.

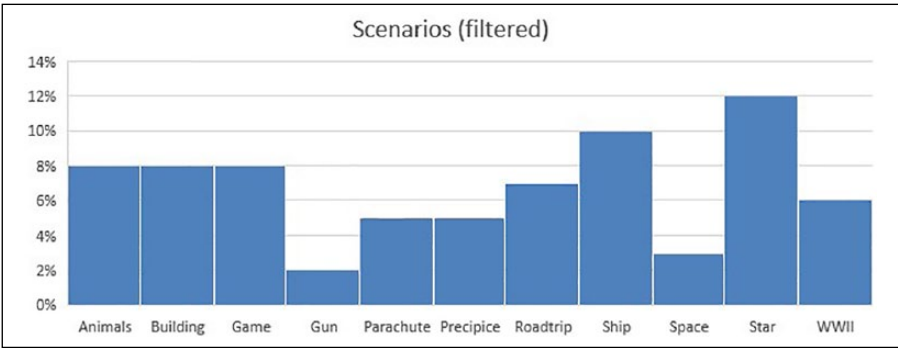


Figure 5. Filtered results – when the same scenario occurred more than once within the work of the same cartoonist, it was only counted as a single occurrence.

Farage eventually metamorphosing into Hitler). This divergence points towards a very frequent mechanism in our corpus: the same scenario is often used by both Leave and Remain cartoonists, with roles being switched in order to turn the metaphor around against the opponent. This strategy, known as ‘trumping’, has been thoroughly studied with regard to adversarial humour in verbal communication (Veale et al., 2006). As suggested by our analysis, its relevance in the circulation of visual metaphor scenarios would deserve further investigation.

Another example of trumping concerns the TRAVEL BY SEA scenario. The COUNTRY IS A SHIP scenario was used widely by British politicians during and after the Brexit campaign: in his resignation speech on 23 June 2016, for instance, David Cameron pledged that he would do everything in his power ‘to steady the ship over the coming weeks and months’, but that at the same time he could not be ‘the captain that steers our country to its next destination’. A few days before, Michael Gove (one of the most vocal supporters of the Leave campaign) used a maritime metaphor in relation to the EU: by voting Leave, Gove claimed, ‘we will . . . be detaching ourselves from the sinking ship that is the European

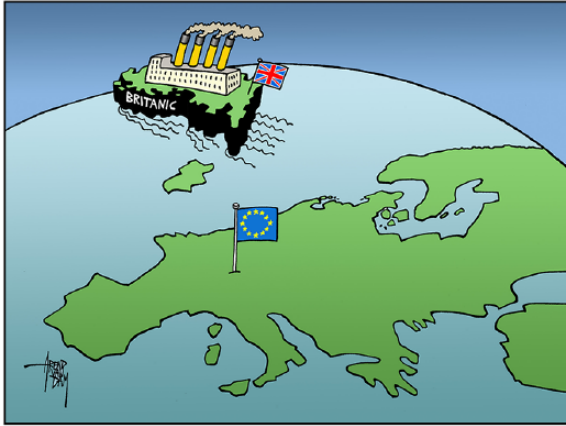


Figure 6. © Arend Van Dam, politicalcartoons.com, 24 June 2016. The cartoon is captioned with the following quotation from David Cameron: 'I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the captain that steers our country to its next destination.'

Union economy' (Ellyat and Frost, 2016). In an interesting feedback loop between political discourse and satirical illustration, Gove seems to have drawn inspiration from a controversial cartoon published in June 2016 by Arron Banks's *Leave.eu* platform, where the EU was depicted as a sinking ship heading over a waterfall, assailed by migrants, and circled by the sharks of 'political correctness' (Brown, 2016). Once again, the metaphor is reversed in several Remain cartoons, where Brexit is represented as a shipwreck for the UK and its political leaders (Bertrams, 7 June 2016; Kamensky, 16 June 2016; Hajjaj, 19 June 2016; Constantin, 22 June 2016; Komarnitski, 23 June 2016; Chappatte, 24 June 2016; Granlund, 24 June 2016; Van Dam, 24 June 2016; Tom, 27 June 2016; Kamensky, 30 June 2016). See, for instance, Van Dam's cartoon in Figure 6.

On a general level, it is possible to notice a striking difference in the use of metaphor scenarios between visual and verbal discourse about Brexit. Despite the lack of systematic statistical analysis on the subject, based on available studies the most frequent scenarios in verbal communication seem to be UK AND EU AS MARRIED PARTNERS (Đurović and Silaški, 2018), BRITAIN AS THE HEART OF EUROPE (Musolff, 2017), and adversarial metaphors such as POLITICAL CAMPAIGN IS WAR OR SPORT (Spinzi and Manca, 2017). It is indeed worth noting that all three scenarios are extremely under-represented in our corpus: the HEART OF EUROPE metaphor is totally absent from the corpus; the war metaphor is only present in WORLD WAR II cartoons, where the adversarial implications are mostly overshadowed by the parallel between Brexiters and Nazis (i.e. the main emphasis is on Nazism itself, rather than on the war); likewise, the SPORT (or game) metaphor is mostly used in Remain cartoons, which tend to downplay the adversarial component – for instance, in a cartoon exploiting the football metaphor, the UK is not represented as a team playing against the EU, but as a defecting player within the EU team (Boligan, 26 June). Lastly, the married partners scenario only occurs twice (Van Dam, 8 June; Delonas, 29 June), with the UK being portrayed as the husband and the EU as the abandoned wife;

in verbal occurrences, instead, the EU is consistently presented as the ‘aggrieved husband’, while the UK is the ‘unfaithful wife’ (Đurović and Silaški, 2018). This gender switch might be due to a series of factors: in the Van Dam cartoon, for instance, it might be a way to shift the reader’s sympathy towards the EU, since in the marriage scenario the wife tends to be stereotypically portrayed as the weaker – and therefore more vulnerable – person in the couple (Đurović and Silaški, 2018); in Delonas’s work, instead, the main reason seems to be the visual identification between the EU and the demi-goddess Europa, while the UK is represented by a male character (John Bull).

That being said, how can we explain the particular frequency of other scenarios, as opposed to the three we have just discussed? At least three hypotheses can be proposed, none of which alone is sufficient to fully account for our results: (1) firstly, some of the most widely used scenarios lend themselves particularly well to a visual rendition. The EU LOSING A STAR scenario (13 per cent of the corpus) is a prime example of this, since it is clearly based on the visual memorability of the 12 stars in the EU logo; the same applies to other frequent scenarios, such as UNREST AMONG ANIMALS (the Bull as a visual symbol for Europe, the Lion and the Bulldog as British icons, etc.) and TRAVEL BY SEA (playing with the geographical shape of the UK, resembling a ship detaching itself from the continent). However, this does not really explain why other metaphors (such as EU AND UK AS MARRIED PARTNERS) are so under-represented, despite being quite prone to visual treatment. (2) Another possible explanation has to do with the prevalence of Remain cartoons in the corpus. As mentioned above, Remain cartoonists tend to avoid scenarios in which the EU is presented as an adversary to the UK – as a consequence, they tend to prefer those in which the UK is hurting itself autonomously (heading towards shipwreck, falling from a precipice, using a defective parachute, etc.), rather than being in a mutual fight with the EU (as normally implied, for instance, by the MARRIED PARTNERS scenario). This also ties in well with the outcomes discussed in Section 2.2 with regard to the most frequently depicted causes (incompetence, lack of information) and consequences (self-destructive decision) in the cartoonists’ framing of Brexit. (3) Lastly, the prevalence of Remain cartoons also explains the over-representation of scenarios that can be used to illustrate the extreme, irreversible consequences in store for the UK (TRAVEL BY SEA = shipwreck; PRECIPICE = falling from a cliff; DEFECTIVE PARACHUTE = crashing to the ground), which of course could not be achieved via the MARRIED PARTNERS scenario (where the final outcome, divorce, is far less dramatic). This aspect will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.5 (Effects).

3.3 Sources UK

In several cartoons, the UK is represented by more than one actor or object. As a consequence, the overall sum of the results (149) significantly exceeds the total number of cartoons (119). The most frequent result is, by far, UK AS A PERSON (80 occurrences, 67 per cent of the corpus – see Figure 7). This finding is particularly remarkable, since the use of personification is much less widespread when it comes to representing the EU (see Section 3.4). Why is the UK so often humanized by cartoonists, compared to the EU? As discussed in Section 2.2, ‘Causes in the UK’ (47 per cent) are much more frequently addressed than ‘Causes in EU’ (14 per cent): Brexit tends to be framed as a UK decision

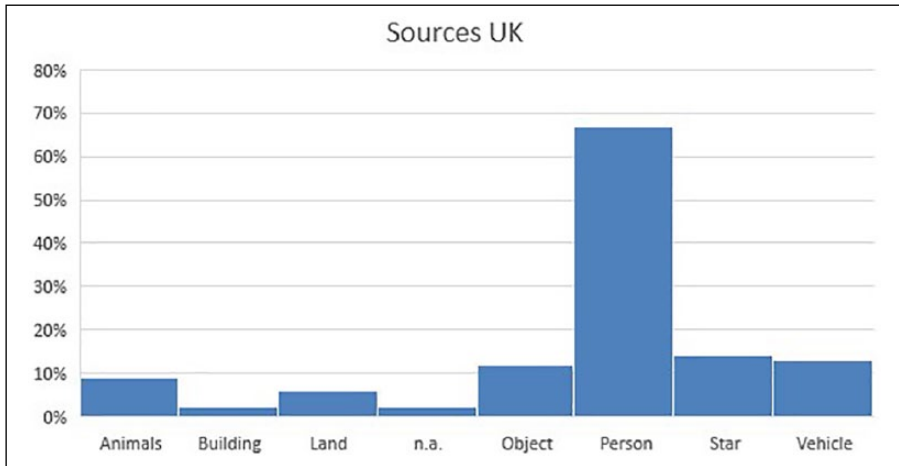


Figure 7. Sources UK. In order of frequency: Person (67 per cent of the corpus); Star (14 per cent); Vehicle (13 per cent); Other object (12 per cent); Animals (9 per cent); Land/geographical shape (6 per cent); Building and n.a. (2 per cent).

triggered by internal causes, rather than the consequence of an action performed by the EU. The UK is therefore assigned a more active role, which contributes to explaining why it is more frequently represented as a human being as opposed to the EU (which is typically portrayed as an object, or not even featured in the cartoon).

Most UK personifications can be seen as ‘metaphtonymies’ (Morozova, 2017), i.e. metaphors based on a source-in-target metonymy. In other words, the source used to personify the UK is often a public figure or cultural symbol already associated to the UK, thus generating a symbolic/metonymic/metaphorical chain – an articulate reflection on these kinds of ‘conceptual chains’, in which a metonymy is subsumed under a broader metaphor, can be found in Negro Alousque (2014). The most frequent sources for personification are present-day British politicians, namely David Cameron (14 occurrences), Boris Johnson (9) and Nigel Farage (9). With regard to British symbols and icons, the most widespread option is a stereotyped representation of the early twentieth-century English businessman with bowler hat, suitcase and umbrella (21 occurrences – see Figure 1); other options include Winston Churchill (2), John Bull (2), Queen Elizabeth II (1), Hamlet (1), James Bond (1) and the Johnnie Walker whisky logo (1). The widespread use of the old-fashioned English businessman as a Brexit icon is particularly interesting, considering that present-day white-collar workers predominantly voted Remain. Based on the demographics of the referendum (see Evans et al., 2018: 351–4), the working class would be a more suitable metonymy for Brexit – 63 per cent of working-class voters opted for Leave as opposed to 44 per cent of middle-class voters, with an even bigger gap between voters without a degree (72 per cent Leave) and voters with a degree (35 per cent Leave). On the one hand, this disconnect between the cartoonists’ rhetorical strategy and the social reality of Brexit seems to confirm the idea that cartoons do not offer overly detailed arguments regarding political events (Section 2.2). On the other hand, the

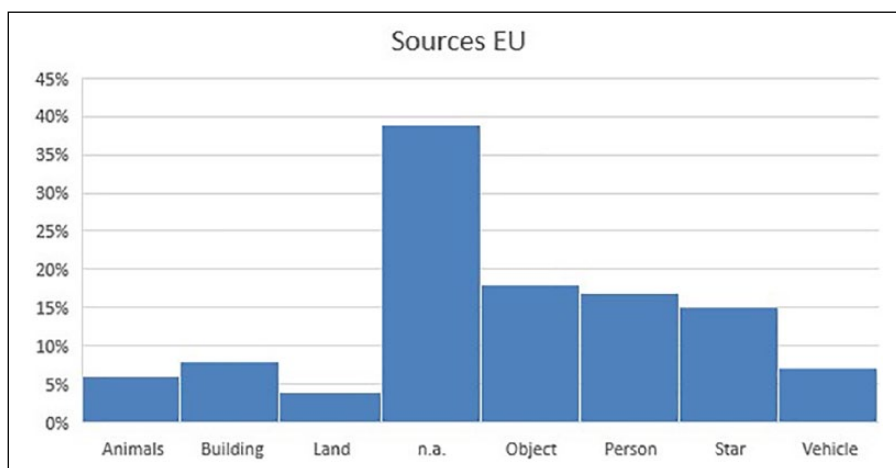


Figure 8. Sources EU. In order of frequency: n.a. (39 per cent of the corpus); Object (18 per cent); Person (17 per cent); Stars (15 per cent); Building (8 per cent); Vehicle (7 per cent); Animals (6 per cent); Land / geographical shape (4 per cent).

businessman serves here as a symbol of Britishness (just like John Bull or Winston Churchill), rather than a metonymy or synecdoche for the electorate; so, in this sense, its widespread use is an accurate reflection of the key role played by identity politics in the outcome of the referendum. The importance of cultural identity in Brexit debates is further confirmed by the metaphonymies used in Leave cartoons, where the UK is never represented by a single present-day politician, since the cartoonists prefer to employ collective icons of British pride and national unity: the five cases of personification feature Winston Churchill (2 occurrences), John Bull (2) and the businessman (1), while the three instances of animalization involve highly symbolic animals such as the Lion (2) and the Bulldog (1) – not by chance, the Bulldog as a symbol of British courage was ‘widely associated with Churchill during the Second World War’ (Baker, 1993: 52).

3.4 Sources EU

When comparing EU and UK sources, two differences are particularly striking: first of all, Figure 8 clearly shows that the EU is very often excluded from direct representation (n.a. is the most frequent option, with 39 per cent of the corpus), while the UK is virtually – and understandably – always present; secondly, the instances of personification are very few compared to the UK (17 per cent EU v. 67 per cent UK), with the EU being far more frequently portrayed as an inanimate object or a building.

As discussed in the previous section (3.4), the main reason behind this difference is that the UK is generally assigned with a much more active role in Brexit, and therefore is more likely to be depicted as a sentient human being. An additional explanation lies in the multiplicity inherent to the EU as a political entity: while the UK can easily be represented through the COUNTRY AS AN INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BODY metaphor, this is clearly not

the case with the EU. As a consequence, both in Remain and Leave cartoons, metaphors for the EU tend to stress its plural nature – e.g. a building allowing for different items/countries to coexist (10 occurrences); a vehicle with many travellers, such as a train, a boat or a plane (8 occurrences); a group of animals (proverbial frogs in a wheelbarrow in Van Dam, 21 June; dogs in a dog house in Sluka, 27 June, etc.); or lastly, and more generally, any kind of composite object (such as a tree with several branches in Sutovec, 26 June; a Jenga set with dozens of tiles in Cristina, 26 June; a device with many cogs in Pavel, 30 June).

Due to its composite identity, the EU is more difficult to subsume under one cohesive, widely shared metonymy, icon or cultural symbol. Therefore, it is not surprising that the metonymic/symbolic/metaphorical chain discussed in Section 3.3 is far less relevant in the case of the EU. As far as shared icons are concerned, the only instances for the EU are the mythological figures of the demi-goddess Europa (four occurrences) and the Bull under whose semblance Zeus abducted her (three), and of course the stars in the EU logo (18 occurrences). Likewise, the EU is far less likely to be represented by one single politician: the only cases of personification through a present-day political figure involve Jean-Claude Juncker (three occurrences) and Angela Merkel (one). Notably, politicians related to the EU are never featured in non-European cartoons, while UK politicians are well represented (three occurrences for Cameron, two for Johnson and two for Farage), which highlights the scarce global visibility of EU politicians, as well as the perceived impersonal aspect of EU politics.

3.5 Effects

When it comes to effects, i.e. the ultimate outcome of the mini-narrative generated by the cartoon, two trends are particularly evident: first of all, a far stronger emphasis is placed on consequences within the UK (80 occurrences v. 32 for the EU); secondly, the most frequent effects depicted for the UK are of an extreme, irreversible nature, such as death (20 occurrences) and destruction (15 occurrences), as opposed to the relatively moderate consequences depicted for the EU (dysfunction features in 18 occurrences). A full overview is provided in Figures 9 and 10, while Figure 11 provides an example of the depiction of death as a result of the FALLING STAR scenario. As shown in Figure 12, the irreparable damages predicted to be in store for the UK are often the implied consequences of extreme scenarios, such as falling from a precipice, jumping off a plane with a defective parachute, or navigating perilous seas with an old and unsteady ship.

This result is clearly in line with the tendency to frame Brexit as a self-destructive decision for the UK (see Section 2.2). Moreover, on a general level, the emphasis on extreme consequences does not come as a complete surprise, given how the cartoon as a genre tends to ‘appeal mostly to the emotional sphere’ in order to provoke a strong reaction in the reader (Morozova, 2017: 272). However, this particular case calls for further reflection, in the light of the specific features of the Brexit debate. As pointed out by Steve Buckledee in his ground-breaking study *The Language of Brexit*, it is ‘difficult to sound impassioned and to employ coruscating rhetoric when your message is that, on balance, it is better to stick with the status quo and just leave things as they are’ (Buckledee, 2018: 1). As a consequence, the verbal rhetoric typically employed by

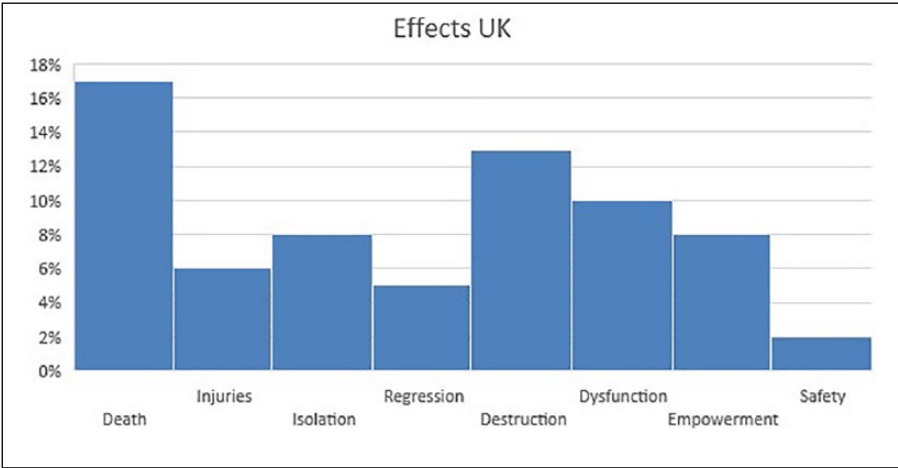


Figure 9. Effects within the UK. In order of frequency: death (17 per cent of the corpus); destruction (13 per cent); dysfunction (10 per cent); isolation (8 per cent); empowerment (8 per cent); injuries (6 per cent); regression (5 per cent); and safety (2 per cent). NB: The results for ‘isolation’ here do not fully coincide with those presented for the same category in Section 2.2; this is due to the fact that in this instance ‘isolation’ is considered to be the direct outcome of a metaphor scenario, rather than an implied consequence on the level of framing.

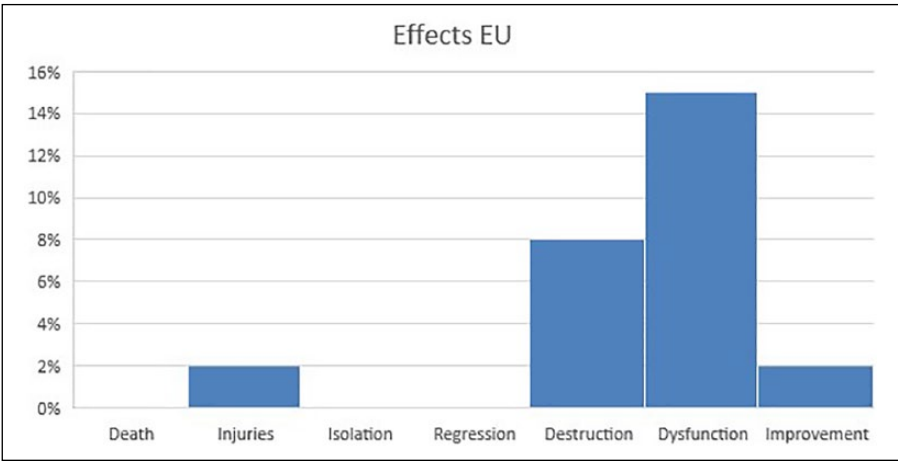


Figure 10. Effects within the EU. In order of frequency: dysfunction (15 per cent of the corpus); destruction (8 per cent); injuries (2 per cent) and improvement (2 per cent).

Remain campaigners comes across as dispassionate and lacklustre, compared to the ‘grandiloquent language’ and ‘powerful metaphors’ characterizing the Leave movement (2018: 1). Looked at from this perspective, the insistence on extreme situations in anti-Brexit cartoons can be interpreted as a way to mirror the bombastic and hyperbolic language of pro-Leave media and politicians, thus compensating for the perceived lack of



Figure 11. © Marian Kamensky, politicalcartoons.com, 11 June 2016.

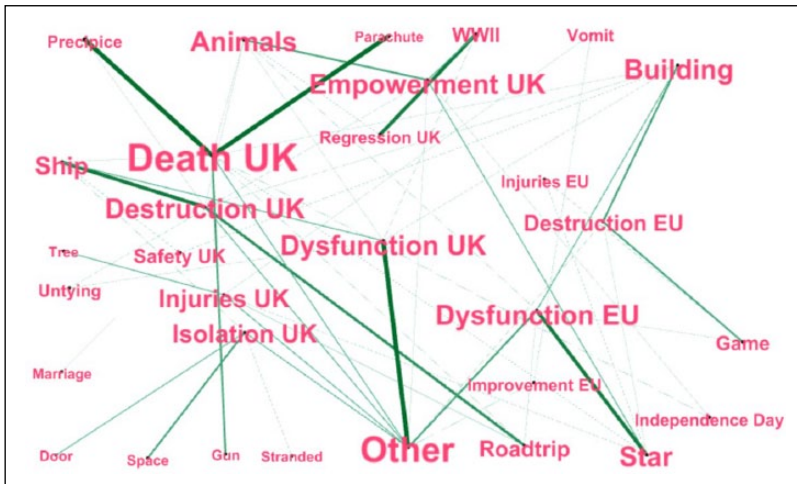


Figure 12. Gephi-generated graph mapping the relations between Scenarios, Effects UK, and Effects EU.

(verbal) energy on the Remain side. In short, the populist hyperboles underpinning Leave rhetoric seem to have caused a broader polarization and extremism in the Brexit debate, encouraging pro-Remain cartoonists to exaggerate their arguments (and their metaphors) in a way comparable to their opponents.

4. Conclusion

The first relevant finding in the present study emerged during the assembling of the corpus, with 89 per cent of the original 136 cartoons featuring at least one metaphor scenario. This

attests to the pervasiveness of visual and multimodal metaphors in cartoons, especially when it comes to framing political issues. Section 2 subsequently showed that most cartoons in our corpus frame Brexit as a self-destructive decision caused by internal problems (47 per cent) and leading to negative consequences for the UK itself (58 per cent). Notably, 46 per cent of the cartoons do not refer to any specific aspect or argument in favour of or against Brexit: this points to a crucial feature of the cartoon genre, whereby a high level of rhetorical complexity (e.g. the widespread use of metaphor and metonymy) coexists with a strong tendency to condensation on an argumentative level. The aim of most cartoons is to appeal to the reader's capacity for *fast thinking* – in short, they tend to trigger an instinctive and emotional response, as opposed to deliberate analytical reflection. The use of multiple rhetorical tools is therefore instrumental to the former purpose, rather than to detailed and accurate argumentation.

The analysis of the metaphor scenarios presented in Section 3 led to three main findings: (1) Metaphor scenarios – including their metonymical or symbolic components – provided a pervasive common vocabulary for Brexit debates, within and beyond the realm of satirical cartoons. Both Remain and Leave supporters engaged with the same scenarios (World War II, travel by sea, etc.), often turning them against each other through the rhetorical strategy known as *trumping*. (2) Metaphorical or metonymical personification is far more frequent for the UK than for the EU. This may be due to a variety of factors, including the UK being assigned a more active role, the composite and plural nature of the EU, and the greater difficulty in finding political figures or cultural symbols capable of representing the EU as a whole. (3) The ultimate outcome of the cartoon mini-narrative is most frequently a negative one for the UK, with a particular emphasis on extreme and irreversible effects (in particular, death and destruction). This hyperbolic aspect of anti-Brexit cartoons can be seen as a way of mirroring the excesses of the populist rhetoric characterizing the Leave campaign, thus compensating for the relatively dispassionate language employed by Remain supporters.

More generally, by focusing on the specific case of Brexit, this study has shown how political crises can trigger a phase of self-reflection and renewal that also occurs on the level of figurative language: new metaphors are created (e.g. the FALLING STAR scenario), while old ones are re-functionalized (e.g. the country as a ship or as a building), as if the changes brought about by Brexit caused a widespread need to rethink the EU's position in our metaphorical imaginary. The present analysis will hopefully pave the way for further research on the dynamics underlying the circulation, re-functionalization and innovation of monomodal and multimodal metaphor scenarios regarding Europe's crises both before and after the Brexit referendum.

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